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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000175

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SUBJECT: NO TEARS SHED FOR MUGNIYAH IN KUWAIT

Classified By: CDA Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Kuwaiti opinion has long regarded Imad Mugniyah as a terrorist with Kuwaiti blood on his hands. Accordingly, Kuwaiti newspapers generally presented his February 13 assassination as, at best, a predictable end to a violent life. Kuwait Interior Minister Jaber Al-Khaled publicly called Mugniyah's death "divine retribution" for his crimes. Kuwait FM Dr. Mohammed is expected to condemn Mugniyah as a terrorist in a February 16 press conference and stress that terrorism will not contribute to solving challenges facing the region. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Kuwaiti newspapers largely hailed the February 13 assassination of Hezbollah terrorist leader Imad Mugniyah, portraying his death as a victory over terrorism. Kuwaitis blame Mugniyah for the hijacking of two Kuwait Airlines aircraft, flight 221 in 1983 and flight 422 in 1988, the latter resulting in the torture and murder of two Kuwaiti citizens. Mugniyah is believed to have ordered the hijackings in an attempt to secure the release of the Al-Dawa 17 terrorist cell, which was responsible for a string of terrorist attacks in Kuwait in the early 1980s, including the bombing of Embassy Kuwait. The GOK had convicted and imprisoned the Al-Dawa 17 members and was adamant in its refusal to release them. One of the Al-Dawa 17, Moustafa Yousef Badreddin, was reportedly Mugniyah's brother-in-law and cousin.

¶3. (C) Mugniyah's assassination received front-page coverage in all of Kuwait's daily newspapers. Al-Rai newspaper described Mugniyah as a criminal and a terrorist who received the punishment he deserved. The Kuwait Times recapped Mugniyah's hijackings of the Kuwait Airlines flights, noting that more than half the population of Kuwait is under the age of 25 and "it is important to remind ourselves of the violent incidents of the 1980s which have a Mugniyah connection." Only the Arabic daily Al Anbaa remained impartial in its coverage of Mugniyah's assassination, solely presenting facts taken from the wire services. (Note: Al Anbaa's managing editor is a Lebanese Shiite who typically reports views sympathetic to Hezbollah. End note.)

¶4. (C) On February 14, Kuwaiti Interior Minister Shaykh Jaber Al-Khaled Al Sabah said that Mugniyah's death was "divine retribution against someone who had killed the sons of Kuwait." His deputy, Na'ib Al-Huriyiti condemned Mugniyah as a criminal who instigated the "killing of innocents and the kidnapping of believers." He said the GOK should "take another look at the governments and organizations that had hidden and concealed Imad Mugniyah for all of these years." Al-Rai ran the Minister's comments alongside photos of the deceased Kuwaitis on its front page.

15. (C) CDA contacted FM Dr. Mohammad,s office director, Shaykh Ahmed Nasser Al Sabah, on February 14 to discuss how the MFA plans to respond to Mugniyah,s assassination. Shaykh Ahmed said the FM expects to be asked about the issue during a press conference scheduled for February 16 - just before departure for Argentina. Dr. Mohammad will thus be prepared to comment in response to questions. Shaykh Ahmed asked if the USG had advice in this regard. CDA reviewed the Department's February 13 statement and recommended that the FM echo the sentiment of that statement to the maximum possible extent. In particular, the FM should stress that Mugniyah,s terrorist crimes should not be accorded legitimacy as "acts of resistance" or the like. Shaykh Ahmed welcomed the suggestion, noting that the Department's statement closely reflected the GOK view. He said he would carefully review the Department's statement again, and that he expected the FM to stress Mugniyah,s acts of mass murder, including against Kuwaitis, and reiterate the GOK,s view that acts of terrorism lack legitimacy and will not contribute to solving any of the challenges facing the region.

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